



Evidence Based Practice for Soap and Water Handwashing

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout our experience in a large, urban teaching hospital, we evaluated the frequency and appropriate methods in which hand hygiene was performed by nurses. We noticed every nurse used an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when leaving patient rooms, but no one in our clinical group saw their nurse wash their hands with antimicrobial hand soap. There were several different reasons behind the lack of compliance with soap and water hand washing. Rationales for this included the lack of sinks outside of patient rooms, convenience of hand rub compared to soap and water, and lack of enforcement of the current handwashing policy. These findings motivated us to further research the benefits of using soap and water for hand hygiene instead of hand sanitizer. While there is research showing that alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective, there are times when only hand washing with antimicrobial soap and water is recommended.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of twenty articles regarding the use of antimicrobial hand soap and water versus the use of alcohol based hand rub found a general consensus is that they are equally effective. In some cases, however, such as if hands are visibly soiled, it is more effective to use soap and water. Certain diseases (*Clostridium difficile*) require antimicrobial hand soap washing to remove the bacterium from the hands.

PROTOCOL

The following is the protocol found in the employee handbook for hand hygiene at a large teaching hospital in an urban area:

- The Threshold Rule: All healthcare workers must practice effective hand hygiene every time they “cross the threshold” of the patient’s room or bed space area, regardless of whether or not the intention is to actually touch the patient.

Effective Hand Hygiene:

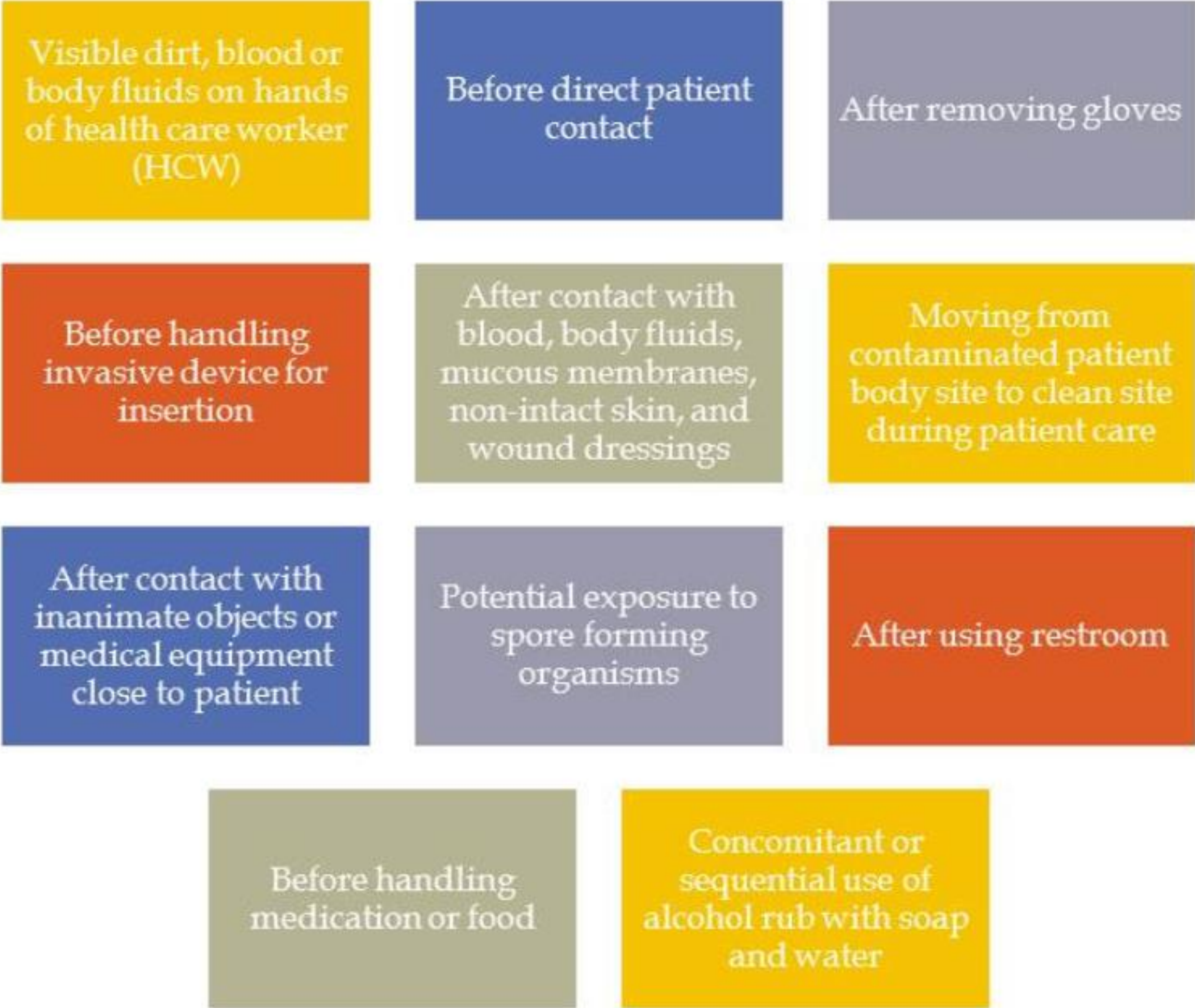
Soap and Water – when hands are visibly soiled, after using the restroom, before eating, or when caring for a patient with suspected or confirmed *Clostridium difficile*.

- Wet hands, use enough soap sufficient to cover hands, rub hands together for 15 seconds, rinse hands, dry with a paper towel, and turn off facet with a paper towel.

Alcohol-based Sanitizer – used in situation where hands are not soiled with dirt or contaminated with blood or other organic material.

- Apply a dime to quarter size portion of sanitizer into hand (enough to coat all surfaces of the hands and fingers), rub all over hands until dry.

PROPER TECHNIQUE



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